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U.S. Restricts Sale of 5 Chemicals To Iraq After Poison Gas Report

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WASHINGTON, March 30 — The United States announced today that it was imposing stringent restrictions on the sale to Iraq of five chemical compounds that can be used in making the poison gases Iraq has been accused of using in its war with Iran.

At the same time, the State Department confirmed a report in The New York Times today that quoted American intelligence officials as saying they had evidence that Iraq had used nerve gas against Iran. Earlier the United States said it was convinced that Iraq had also used mustard gas, a blistering agent.

John Hughes, the State Department spokesman, said the curbs on the export of the chemicals also applied to Iran, but there have been no allegations that Iran has used chemical weapons in the war, which began in September 1980.

The reason for applying the curbs equally against the two sides was to emphasize continuing American neutrality in the war, department officials said, even though the restrictions were primarily intended to affect Iraq.

As far as Washington can tell, Mr. Hughes said, United States companies have not been the source of the compounds used in the manufacture of the Iraqi mustard and nerve gases. But it is difficult, an official said, for the United States to try to persuade West German, Japanese and other European countries that have exported such compounds to Iraq to bar the export of the chemicals if the United States does not move first against American companies.

In West Germany, officials said they did not believe that a pesticide laboratory a German company sold to Iraq was now producing nerve gas, but they acknowledged that it theoretically

could be changed for that purpose.

The chemicals are fairly common and have been used in the manufacture of pesticides and other nonmilitary products, officials said. Until now, no particular attention was paid to the export of those chemicals because of their widespread applicability, they said.

Export Licenses Face Review

Mr. Hughes said that "as a result of our continued concern about the use of chemical weapons, the Secretaries of State and Commerce have decided to institute foreign policy controls for the export to Iran and Iraq of certain compounds which could be used in the manufacture of chemical weapons."

He said that henceforth, each application for a license to export the chemicals would be considered individually.

"Applications will generally be denied where there is reason to believe that these chemicals will be used in producing chemical weapons or will otherwise be devoted to chemical warfare," Mr. Hughes said.

The 5 Chemicals

"This position is consistent with our strong policies in opposition to the use of prohibited chemical weapons and our policy of neutrality in the Iran-Iraq war," he said.

He said the five chemicals were potassium fluoride, dimethyl methylphosphonate, methylphosphonyl difluoride, phosphorous oxychloride and thioglycol.

Matthew Meselson, a Harvard biochemist and an authority on chemical warfare, said today that thioglycol was used in making mustard gas. He said phosphorous oxychloride was used in making the nerve gas known as Tabun, which is regarded as the first nerve gas ever developed. The three other compounds are used in the manufacture of a nerve gas known as GB or as Sarin.

Sarin is one of the most potent nerve gases and is stockpiled by the United States Army, according to a standard reference book on chemical warfare published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute in 1973.

A Balance of Criticism

A United Nations report issued last Monday said an investigative team found traces of Tabun and of mustard gas during on-site inspections of the battle zone two weeks ago.

Mustard gas, widely used in World War I, is a blistering agent. Nerve gases can cause paralysis of the respiratory system.

The attention paid to the American accusations against Iraq — which Iraq has repeatedly denied — has tended to overshadow Washington's overall concern that Iran, which has a much larger army and population, not win the war. The United States is concerned that the defeat of Iraq could lead to the emergence of an extreme anti-Western form of Islamic fundamentalism throughout the Persian Gulf area.

Thus, Mr. Hughes, in addition to repeating concern about the use of poison gas by Iraq, said that "in humanitarian terms, we cannot and should not limit our attention to the victims of chemical weapons."

"Instead, we must also work to stop the tragedy of the tens of thousands of lives — many of them belonging to children — which are needlessly being lost because of the Iranian regime's continued attempts to spread its revolution throughout the region," he said.

State Department officials said that so far, Iraq had used nerve gas only experimentally, not in a concerted fashion.

The report in The Times today quoted a senior American official as saying that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had examined the possibility of an American air strike on Iraqi storage sites for the chemical agents but had concluded it was not feasible. The article also reported that the official said that high-level talks had been held with Israel on the issue and that some American officials said they would like to see Israel bomb the Iraqi sites.

Those assertions were strongly denied today by Mr. Hughes. He said there had been no discussion in the Administration of either an American or an Israeli air strike against Iraq.

The United States has been trying to prevent the sale to either Iran or Iraq of any goods that could be used in the military conflict. On Wednesday, customs agents in Minneapolis seized \$7 million worth of tank parts that had been on the way to Iran disguised as car parts. It has also repeatedly refused permission to other countries to export American-made goods to Iran or Iraq for use in the war.

But even these efforts are sometimes upset. For instance, outboard motors sold to Iran for recreational purposes turned up in war photos of Iranian forces using rubber boats powered by the engines.